

# M'NAMARA SAYS DESTROYERS IN '64 WARNED OF ENEMY

**Tells Senators That 2 Ships  
Remained on Patrol Despite  
Threat of Hostile Action**

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 24—Some 15 hours before they came under attack in the Gulf of Tonkin in August, 1964, two American destroyers warned higher command that North Vietnam regarded them as enemy craft.

Despite the warning, Congressional testimony disclosed today, the destroyers were not instructed to break off their intelligence-gathering patrol off the coast of North Vietnam.

About 15 hours later—on the night of Aug. 4, 1964—they became involved in a naval encounter with North Vietnamese patrol boats that was to mark a turning point in the American involvement in the Vietnam war.

This new facet of the controversial Gulf of Tonkin incident was disclosed with the release of testimony by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

## Reason for Retaliation

The testimony was given by Mr. McNamara on Tuesday in defense of the Administration's decision to retaliate by ordering the first air strikes against North Vietnam and by seeking Congressional approval of resolution endorsing "all necessary measures to be taken by the Administration to prevent further aggression" by North Vietnam.

Throughout the 110 pages of testimony ran two principal themes:

...was there an element of provocation on the part of the destroyers that induced the North Vietnamese to attack? And, seconds, did the Administration have sufficient proof of the attack at the time to warrant a decision that was later to be described by the State Department as "a functional equivalent" of a declaration of war against North Vietnam?

In the course of the all-day closed hearing, Mr. McNamara emphatically denied that there was any element of provocation. He was equally emphatic in insisting that the Adminis-

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tration had conclusive proof of the North Vietnamese attack before ordering air strikes in reprisal.

But from their questions and statements, it was apparent that some of the committee members were unconvinced by the McNamara testimony. Senator J. W. Fulbright, Democrat of Arkansas, who is the committee chairman, and Senator Albert Gore, Democrat of Tennessee, went so far as to suggest that the Administration had misled Congress about details of the incident when it sought approval of the Tonkin resolution in 1964.

The issue of provocation revolved around the question whether the patrol of the two destroyers could have been in any way related—either by North Vietnam or by United States military commanders—to South Vietnamese naval operations at the time against North Vietnamese positions along the coast of the Tonkin Gulf.

## Attack by South

Two days before the Maddox was first attacked on Aug. 2, South Vietnamese patrol boats, as part of an American-assisted operation called "Op 34 Alpha," had bombarded two North Vietnamese islands—Honnieu and Honme. On the night of Aug. 3, the day before the second attack on the Maddox and Turner Joy, the South Vietnamese boats had attacked other North Vietnamese positions, including radar posts.

Mr. McNamara insisted that the two destroyers were "not aware of the details" of the South Vietnamese attacks, were not engaged in a diversionary effort to draw away North Vietnamese attention, and, in fact, had been ordered to keep away from the area of the South Vietnamese attacks.

times acerbic questioning, Senator Fulbright produced a message sent by Capt. John J. Herrick, commander of the destroyer task group, to the commander of the Seventh Fleet on Aug. 3, some 15 hours before the attack.

The message said:

"Evaluation of info from various sources indicates that the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam] considers patrol directly involved with 34A operations. DRV considers U.S. ships present as enemies because of these operations and have already indicated readiness to treat us in that category."

## On High Seas

"Why did his superiors not order him to break it [the patrol] off in view of that cable if they did not wish to provoke an incident?" Senator Fulbright asked.

"Because," Mr. McNamara replied, "we were on the high seas and operating legally and entirely within our rights. The President stated publicly that we could continue to carry out the patrol in international waters in a legal fashion."

The Defense Secretary went on to say that Captain Herrick "now states that he can recall no basis" for coming to the conclusion that North Vietnam was relating the 34A operation and the destroyer patrol and was contemplating hostile action against the destroyers.

In a telephone interview today, Captain Herrick said his message was based "mostly on conjecture on my part," arising from the fact that North Vietnam "had turned hostile" on Aug. 2.

In the course of his testimony, Mr. McNamara presented seemingly conflicting statements about how deeply involved the United States was in the Op-34A operation of South Vietnam. Early in his testimony he acknowledged that the United States had supplied the boats and training but said the operations were "under the command of the South Vietnamese."

## Recommending Targets

But later he suggested that the United States Military Assistance Command in Vietnam was recommending the targets for the operation, and still later he said he thought a MAC/V liaison officer was "in charge" of the operation.

On the crucial question of the evidence available to the Administration, Mr. McNamara described in considerable detail the decision making process that went on within the Pentagon and the White House.

the administration throughout the afternoon of Aug. 4 sought to decide whether to launch a retaliatory air strike.

The three-hour engagement ended at 1:30 P.M. E.D.T. Washington time. At just about the same time, the testimony disclosed, the Pentagon received a message from Captain Herrick reading:

"Review of action makes many recorded contacts and torpedoes fired appear doubtful. Freak weather effects and over-eager sonarman may have accounted for many reports. No actual visual sightings by

Maddox. Suggest complete evaluation before any further action."

## Considered Retaliation

Even before the attack was concluded, the McNamara testimony disclosed, the military was considering various plans for a retaliatory air strike. But on the basis of the Herrick message, Mr. McNamara said he called Adm. U.S. Grant Sharp, commander-in-chief, Pacific, to say:

"We obviously don't want to carry out the retaliatory strike unless we are damned sure what happened."

Mr. McNamara recounted how for the next five hours, in conferences in the Pentagon and in calls to the White House, the Pentagon sought to evaluate the admittedly "ambiguous" and "conflicting" reports coming in from the destroyers about the engagement. Finally at 6:07 P.M., after reviewing all the information, Mr. McNamara said he "released the execute order" for the strike.

Mr. McNamara said he would have reached the conclusion that Theac was an attack just on the basis of the reports from the destroyers. But the "incontrovertible" evidence that "justified" that conclusion, he said, were the intercepted radio messages between North Vietnamese commands and the patrol boats.

## Messages Deleted

In one of the few deletions made by the Pentagon, the intercepted radio messages were removed from the testimony, Mr. McNamara explained, to collecting systems.

But from the questioning it was apparent that the Pentagon, at the time of its decision, had four intercepted radio messages available. As described by the Secretary, the messages showed that the patrol boats—two Swaton boats that do not carry torpedoes and one PT boat—had been ordered to attack the destroyers and shot down American planes, and finally that they were breaking off the engagement with the loss of two boats.